

# *Reviver of Sikhism: Satguru Ram Singh*



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The creation of the Khalsa, by Guru Gobind Singh, about three centuries ago, was indubitably a unique and remarkable event of the history which did affect the socio-religious life and history not only of the people of the Punjab but was also destined to enormously influence the political situations in the neighboring lands for centuries to come. It "might prove very formidable to its neighbours," assessed Col. Poliers, "and overwhelm them in the end."<sup>1</sup> It was a rare kind of revolution ever devised and designed by any religious leader in such a precarious situation as Guru Gobind Singh had to pass through during early years of his pontificate.

Guru Nanak, by virtue of his unique technique of preaching, had founded the Sikh religion by initiating the people by traditional Indian mode of initiation called the Charanpahul.<sup>2</sup> In this mode a small quantity of the water in which Guru's feet had already been washed, was given to a neophyte to drink. As a matter of fact, Guru Gobind Singh followed the suit. "The seed which blossomed in the time of Guru Govind Singh had been sown by Nanak and watered by his successors. The sword which carved the Khalsa's way to glory was, undoubtedly forged by Govind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak ..." <sup>3</sup>

The successors of Guru Nanak had left no stone unturned in organizing and developing the faith by addition, step by step, of some new features as the situation demanded during the pontificate of each of them. The third Guru Amardas, for instance, devised a new way of preaching known as Manji system, termed by Narang as 'a substitute for a diocesan gaddi',<sup>4</sup> that worked wonders in maintaining Guru's links with his followers, when their numbers swelled and geographical expansion of the diocese required additional manpower to serve the purpose of establishing a pragmatic and better rapport with the Sikhs living in distant places. Manji is the Punjabi word used for comparatively small- sized cot which symbolized the centre under the charge of an agent appointed by the Guru for the specific purpose of disseminating both the Sikh ideology and Guru's message. This Guru is credited to have established twenty-two centres or Manjis. "It is evident," observes G.C.Narang, "that this measure of the third Guru must have gone a long way in strengthening the foundations of the Church and in carrying on the propaganda in all parts of the country."<sup>5</sup>

By the time of tenth Guru Gobind Singh, the situation had undergone a drastic change which warranted radical changes in the form and spirit of the organization but such a change was destined to be made by the tenth Nanak. "But the difficulty is that if each generation were allowed to change the religion handed down to it by the past, there would be left no certainty of truth, no continuity of tradition, no inspiration from example."<sup>6</sup>

He thought of convening the assembly of the Sikhs to introduce the changes. Surprisingly, his choice for this too fell upon the Baisakhi day in 1756 Bk.<sup>7</sup> That date perhaps had been predetermined by the Guru as the first day of the second month of Bikarmi calander had been considered an auspicious occasion and was being celebrated by the Indians as a socio-religious fair since times immemorial. In the Sikhs religion the third Guru is credited for the choice of Baisakhi day who had sanctioned it as annual religious discourse day.<sup>8</sup> The idea of convergence of the Sikh multitude on that day at Anandpur seemed to have weighed in his mind. Bawa Sarup Dass Bhalla recounts how gleefully the followers thronged to Anandpur from far and wide.<sup>9</sup> If the approximate figure of 80,000 participants, given by some Sikh scholars is correct, then it undoubtedly was an assembly beyond the scope of those times when there was no modern means of conveyance.<sup>10</sup>

The Guru devised a new way to test the fidelity of the Sikhs before embarking upon new venture. He put to test the entire assembly conglomerated on the bank of the river Sutlej on the fixed day when he appeared with a scintillating sword in his hand and repeatedly asked in stentorian voice if there was anyone who could spare his head for the Guru.

An eerie like silence fell upon the confounded gathering which was frightened at Guru's posture. The obscurantists started whispering among themselves that the Guru had lost his reason. It was on the third call given

by the Master that Daya Ram of Lahore vivaciously offered his head. Then the same demand was put by the Guru four times and each time one person would follow the suit of his predecessor responding to the third call as had been in previous case.<sup>11</sup>

The majority of the historians believe that each time the Sikh was taken into a tent already pitched close to the dais where after the sound of something falling down was heard by the people and the blood was seen flowing out of the tent, implying thus that the Guru had slaughtered male goats surreptitiously tethered there<sup>12</sup> while the other section asserts that the heads of the selected five persons were amputated who were revived by the Guru afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

One historian concludes that it was a test given by the Guru to his followers and as no examiner discloses his test paper in advance, so it is not known as to what happened to the five in the tent.<sup>14</sup> This has made the immediate fate of the five shrouded in the mystery but it is evident that only five –Daya Ram, Dharam Chand, Mohkam Dass, Sahib Chand, and Himat had passed the test out of the gargantuan gathering and, consequently were rechristened by appending an appellation of Singh(Lion) to the individual's original name. They were termed as the 'beloved ones' who are venerated in the Sikh history as the most pious persons.

The above-mentioned horrible scene of the assembly was unexpected. The Guru was determined to

organize his followers anew and in a new way. The proposed new organization of the Sikhs was meant to serve the nation in altogether a new manner. He therefore gave it birth in a unique and queer way from the edge of the sword, ever known in the history of religions.

The tenth Nanak no doubt desired, in accordance with the changed situation and his objective of turning his followers into arms- wielding brave fighters, his campaign pertinently was commenced from the initiating rite itself.

The life of Guru Gobind Singh proved to be a turning point in the history of the Sikhs not merely because he transformed the docile and servile Sikhs into a martial race but primarily because of the introduction of ideological and behavioral changes into the faith of his predecessors which gave the Sikhs a stringent religious discipline based on a specific code of religious conduct hitherto unknown in the fraternity thus infusing a new spirit in them and presenting them in a different form and shape endeavouring to take the religion to unexpected heights so that it may survive all types of onslaughts for centuries to come .Basically he was a religious leader, succeeded to a religious throne of Guru Nanak who was ,according to his own confession, assigned the duty by the Almighty of spreading and protecting the religion. In the light of this objective, martialism was just a means to achieve the real end.<sup>15</sup> The changes which he had aimed at too were not spontaneous but it was a gradual process which had been simmering in his mind since quite some time.<sup>16</sup>

He took, according to Bhangoo, the charanpahul to be the sole reason behind the servility in the Sikhs<sup>17</sup> despite the fact that he himself had been practising the same mode of initiation during the earlier period of his pontificate.<sup>18</sup> "The most significant thing to notice here is the substitution of the double-edged dagger in place of Guru's toe and the meaning is quite clear. The old ideal of humility and surrender was being changed with a new one of self-assertion and self-reliance."<sup>19</sup>

The selection of the five was followed by the administration of the Amrit (nectar) to baptise them which was prepared by reading sacred hymns on pure water brought from the river Sutlej. Most of the accounts differ on the question of the person who prepared the Amrit, the mode of its preparation, reading of the sacred hymns on the occasion to sanctify the water, the steel-weapon used in the process, manner of administration of the Amrit and first recipient of this unique immortalizing beverage.<sup>20</sup> We defer this discussion for some other opportunity due to the paucity of time and space here.

The Guru thereafter delivered a hanangue to these five beloved followers equally meant for the audience and the posterity. It included Do's and Don'ts of his faith that can be termed in modern usage as the 'code of conduct' for the Sikhs. Some practices hitherto a part of the Indian socio- religious life as well as social taboos were rejected. Smoking, stealing, lying, drinking, gambling and cohabiting with any woman outside the wedlock were among the forbidden items. The special care of the hair

was exceptionally emphacised. It is believed that by stressing the care of the hair he 'combined in himself the saintliness of the old Rishis with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept his hair long, which all the world over has always been associated with saintliness.'<sup>21</sup> These postulates also included complete social boycott of some kinds of persons too, as for instance, those who indulged in female infanticide, or smoking etc. Dissociation of the Masands and abolition of any mediator for remitting any contribution to the Guru were among the new directions.

In those days the surviving relatives of the deceased person used to shave their heads as a condolatory rite. Some other would tonsure their children at various shrines. Guru Gobind Singh now attached such a sanctity to the human hair that the Sikhs were ordained not only to take care of their own hair but also directed to sever all kinds of relationship with persons who used to shave their heads.<sup>22</sup> Two other injunctions of wearing the sword, and an underwear of a particular shape and cut were also added.<sup>23</sup> The discipline of five Ks purportedly pronounced by the Guru at this ceremony does not figure in any contemporary or near contemporary account pertaining to the creation of the Khalsa.<sup>24</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh having altered the mode and substance of initiation had transformed the nature and appearance of the Sikhs. He introduced the uniformity and a new discipline in them because he had realized that the discipline " keeps up the spirit of individual against

relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of ebb.<sup>25</sup> It was by virtue of the newly introduced discipline that the Sikhs made enviable history during the eighteenth century when they were destined to struggle hard for their survival facing the liquidation campaigns launched by ruthless functionaries of the despotic rulers offering a reward of twenty-five rupees for the severed head of the Sikh and rupees one hundred for the alive Sikh on one hand,<sup>26</sup> and on the other, forcing Sikh women to manually grind the incredible quantities of the grain with the slain bodies of their children in their laps.<sup>27</sup>

Such a superb and unsurpassed patience, emulative endurance and unprecedented prowess exhibited by the Sikh men and women during the critical period which forms a bloody chapter of the history owed its origin to the seeds sown by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur on the Baisakhi day in 1756 Bk or 1699A.D. It was a different kind of revolution that had emboldened the coward sparrows to tear the dreaded hawks to pieces. Paying glowing tributes to Guru Gobind Singh and his creation, eminent historian, N.K.Sinha remarks, " A nation was up in arms against its enemies and it is the collective efforts of the masses rather than individual achievements that ultimately made the revolution a success. Naturally enough, the story of these years of revolution 'is a story of great things and small, but when all is said, the great predominate, for no blunder could efface the readiness for self-sacrifice displayed by the whole people."<sup>28</sup>

The Sikhs belonging to the higher strata of society had not forsaken the religious code or renounced the tenets and beliefs in eighteenth century. They seemed to have maintained their religious discipline more vigorously upto the adventurous period of their history. "The life of a Sikh Sirdar, in the days of Jassa Singh was very simple. At day break he would rise, perform his ablutions, and dress, repeating the morning prayer or "Sukhmani". He then took his morning meal, which consisted in Jassa Singh's case, of two pounds of flour and half a pound of sugar candy," Griffin observes that the Sirdar would say his evening prayers too and would offer an Ardas before going to bed.<sup>29</sup>

Baba Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala state, knew the importance the Guru had attached to the preservation of the human hair. During the sixth invasion of Ahmedshah Abdali, he was made captive by the former who was determined to divest the latter of his hair. "The Afghan Emperor ordered that Ala Singh's long hair should be cut. Ala Singh, who like all devout Sikhs, considered Kesa as the gift of the tenth Guru, offered to pay the cost... Abdali agreed to the suggestion of Ala Singh and allowed him to retain his hair at the cost of one lakh and twenty thousand rupees.'<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, such a glorious period was followed by the gradual decline of the Khalsa thrusting a vast majority to the abysmal depth that presented very dismal picture in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Sikhism nurtured and irrigated by the blood of the entire family of Guru Gobind Singh was abandoned by the Sikhs

to become a dead wood. Sir Denzil Ibbetson, the Census commissioner, had ventured to say "Sikhism is on the decline."<sup>31</sup> Similar was the observation made by Trumpp who regarded it as a 'waning religion.'<sup>32</sup> "Every shadow of that concord which once formed the strength of the Sikh nation, seemed to be extinguished," Malcolm had observed much before the advent of a pious liberating soul on the stage.<sup>33</sup> Corroborating the same, Major Leech reported the gravity of the situation even in 1844. "The Sikh religion which had long since reached its zenith is now visibly on the decline and the Sikhs themselves say that the 'Manmatya' or free-thinking Sikhs who follow their own whims and fancies instead of principles of Gooroos are daily on the increase."<sup>34</sup>

It is believed that the Sikhs had struggled hard for their religion upto the time of Banda Bahadur<sup>35</sup> and had maintained their identity and tenets upto the Sikh rule of Maharaja Ranjit singh.<sup>36</sup> All the Sikh axiology was forgotten with the demise of the Sikh monarch but a diligent study of his life and times would, on the contrary, reveal the fact that the Sikhism had started declining during the Sikh rule itself and Maharaja's own frequent indulgences in some of the taboos might have encouraged the masses to much laxity.

"The assumption of irresponsible power by Runjeet Singh destroyed, in some degree, the potency of the Khalsa," was lamented by Steinbach who had been one of the foreigner employees of the Sikh monarch. He is accused of abolishing the tradition of Gurmata . 'This

continued till 1809, when the last political Gurmata was held. After this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh abolished the custom of holding a gurmatta for political purposes, and began to take action on the advice of non-Sikh as well as Sikh counselors.<sup>38</sup> Kapur Singh has taken much pains to go into details of the anti-Sikh practices adopted by this Sikh monarch.<sup>39</sup> As the king so are his subjects. "Changes for the worst have always synchronized with the lack of insistence on the baptismal vows. This was in the days of the Sikh rule, when luxury and power tempted our people to consider the vows too hard for them. They lost their identity as Sikhs and became as superstitious about God and his worship as they had been before the time of the Gurus."<sup>40</sup> Considering him as a role model, the contemporary historians, while describing the apostasy amongst the Sikhs, have pertinently raised their accusing fingers more towards this monarch than towards the masses.

The drinking, for instance, had been condemned and prohibited in Sikh scriptures including the Holy Granth<sup>41</sup> but Maharaja Ranjit Singh was addicted to drinking and he did not drink an ordinary liquor. Sir Lapel Griffin discloses that he "has a fierce compound distilled from corn brandy mixed with the juice of meat, opium, musk and various herbs. Of this, he drank large quantities in the evening and at night."<sup>42</sup> Steinbach said that he could 'resist 'potations, pottle deep' of a fiery spirit, a very small dose of which would overthrow an Englishman.' The Maharaja boasted for consuming more liquor even than the Englishmen. He '...in his later days jocosely declared that there was only one British officer who could approach him

in the copiousness of his libations to Bacchus.”<sup>43</sup> Jaffar Begh, a contemporary poet, believes the liquor to be a major factor leading to the protracted death of the Maharaja.<sup>44</sup> Griffin alludes to the death of prominent Sikhs, including Raja Amar Singh of Patiala, Sardul Singh and Lal Singh due to intemperance. “Almost every great family had the same record.”<sup>45</sup>

John Malcolm reports about the commonality too. The Sikhs had started taking liquor professing that it had been sanctioned in the scriptures.<sup>46</sup> “It is rare to see a Singh soldier after sun set, quite sober”. He cites the example of Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluwalia who was first feeling shy to drink in the presence of the former but afterwards ‘did take it.’<sup>47</sup>

While relating his own experience, Mecauleiffe disclosed that it had been only after listening his lecture at Simla revealing that ‘it is known to every Sikh that tobacco is forbidden by his religion, but it is not generally known that wine is equally forbidden,’ that the Patiala Singh Sabha had passed a resolution in favour of total abstinence.<sup>48</sup>

Similar was the situation regarding the tobacco “which is one of the most important of the rules drawn up by Govind Singh for the guidance of his followers.”<sup>49</sup> “the Guru issued the imperative injunction: Thou shalt not smoke.”<sup>50</sup> The Sikhs are supposed to refrain even from touching the leaves of this herb. A French traveller Jacquemont tells us that Murray did never smoke in the

presence of a Sikh and the Sikhs were appreciative of his habit.<sup>51</sup> "The Sikhs have a horror of tobacco. A Mussulman would never smoke in the Punjab in front of a respectable Sikh. This woman (Moran?) who had such influence over the rajah, smoked in his presence in his howdah and he even assisted her to light her hookah, probably the most outrageous exhibition he has made in Lahore."<sup>52</sup>

Several references scattered in the various Sikh scriptures point out that adultery, debauchery and fornication etc had no place in Sikh religion. Guru Gobind Singh too had warned his followers against committing adultery even during the dream.<sup>53</sup>

The Sikhs accordingly maintained such a high morality even during the most critical period that even their invidious and inveterate enemies, such as Qazi Noor Mohammad, could not help praising this aspect of their life. <sup>54</sup> Similarly, the Mohammedan author of Fatuhat Nama-i-Samadi had observed that "If a woman falls into their (the Khalsa) hands, they look upon her as their mother.<sup>55</sup> But now they had fallen victim to licentiousness of worse type.

"Their moral character with regard to women, and indeed in most other points may, from the freedom of their habits, generally be considered as much more lax than that of their ancestors, who lived under the restraint of severe restrictions ..." <sup>56</sup> The Maharaja is most conspicuous for moral violations too. "Ranjit's excesses are shameless. The fact that this grey-beard has had and has a number of catamites is nothing shocking in this country," laments

Jacquement, " The inhabitants of Lahore saw him a hundred times in those days sitting with her (Moran) on an elephant, and toying with her as though in the zenana, and that in broad day light, surrounded by a large escort and talking and laughing with them all the time."<sup>57</sup> Going a step farther, Prinsep vituperates him for being 'licentious in the extreme disregardful of all ties of blood' too. <sup>58</sup> Sodomy among well to do families had become a fashion in those days .<sup>59</sup>

Henry Lawrence, has shed some more light on this aspect of life in the Punjab. "The Sikh princes, nobles and Sirdars spent their time in the brothel of the city leaving their wives to console themselves with the servants or chance lovers."<sup>60</sup> Immorality to such an extent resulted in the extinction of many a noble family due to the venereal diseases contracted through such extramarital relationship and unnatural sexual intercourse prevalent in the society.<sup>61</sup>

The Sikhs had become such deicides that following the cold-blooded murder of Bhai Bir Singh Naurangabadi while at prayers, they had boastfully declared that they would not allow any hermit or saint to survive upon the earth.<sup>62</sup> This murder was such a heinous crime which even the westerners would have feared to commit.<sup>63</sup>

Reverence for the human hair too had become a thing of the past. The removal of the hair was regarded such an heinous and sacrilegious crime that the person committing this crime was declared as an apostate while that indulging in other prohibited practices was declared

just 'tankhahya' who deserved comparatively minor punishment.'<sup>64</sup> Griffin mentions Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as having 'over hanging eyebrows'<sup>65</sup> That kind of care had been discarded as the Sikhs had started resorting to various methods of removal of the hair from the different parts of the body.<sup>66</sup> They were originally instructed to support a flowing beard but violation of this injunction too owed its origin to the family of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as Maharaja Sher Singh had been the first to introduce the tying of the beard<sup>67</sup> which ultimately paves the way to trimming and cutting or shaving it.

Reading of the scripture and the scriptural hymns, which formed the part of the mandatory morning and evening prayers of the ancestors had utterly been abandoned with the result that the carelessly shelved volumes of the Holy Granth either gathered dust or had fallen victims to the mice.<sup>68</sup> Majority of the Sikhs no longer offered ambrosial or evening prayers themselves but mocked at others who obeyed the injunctions in this regard.<sup>69</sup>

The baptism by the amrit was regarded as the basis of the Sikh religion<sup>70</sup> The strength of the Sikh religion depended upon the newly initiated persons as the child born in the Sikh family does not become naturally a Sikh according to the code of conduct unless and until one is baptized after subscribing to the Sikh religious code. The Sikhs of the period under discussion had forsaken this custom also. "From the time of Govind (Singh) onwards, and especially during the period of Ranjit Singh's reign spiritual fervor, national pride and anti- Islamic fanaticism

operated powerfully to swell the number of those who embraced the Sikh faith. With the annexation of the Punjab, Sikhism lost much of its old popularity and its members, uncertain of the attitude of their new masters, refrained from bringing their sons for baptism," was observed by Patrie.<sup>71</sup>

The forlorn picture has its details in the Administration report for the year 1851-52 which pointed out, "...These men joined in thousands, and they now desert in equal numbers. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came, and they bring up their children as Hindus. The sacred tank at Umrtsar is less thronged than formerly and the attendance at the annual festivals is diminishing yearly., the initiating ceremony for adult persons is now rarely performed," was the conclusion of the report.<sup>72</sup>

Any religion much flourishes under political patronage. Macauliffe points out that Emperor Akbar's historian, Abul Fazl, very clearly saw the advantage of State support to a religion. 'Men of deep sight are of opinion that even spiritual progress among a people would be impossible, unless emanating from the king, in whom the light of God dwells.'<sup>73</sup> If examined from this point of view, the Sikh rule proved to be a boon to the religion of the monarch. This assertion may be substantiated with the hypothesis that there had been about ten million Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>74</sup> Even the Brahmins from the United Province had embraced the creed of the monarch which suitably benefited them in

political and administrative ascendancy. Similar observation was made by Sir Lapel Griffin who compared and contrasted the contemporary situation with the previous one. "During the days of Ranjit Singh, when spiritual fervour and national pride worked in common, the numbers who joined the dominant faith were proportionately great. At the time of the first British census of 1855 the outside influences were depressing. The Khalsa had fallen to rise no more...."<sup>75</sup> Their number was horribly declined.

Prasad, for instance, is regarded as a sacred thing in Indian religious life and is prepared with careful sanctity.<sup>76</sup> In Sikh religion too it usually is offered to the Gurus or the Almighty before or after embarking on any important mission to seek the blessings or for thanksgiving on success. When the Khalsa armies were to march for the Anglo -Sikh wars in December 1845, the Sikh soldiers asked a sweetmaker to prepare the Prasad who used the obnoxious water polluted with the smoking pipe which is condemned as a sacrilege.<sup>77</sup> It did not auger well and the Sikh armies were defeated.

The Masand system had long been abolished by Guru Gobind Singh but the Masands did still exist in one form or the other. The clergy who was supposed to guide the ignoramus their way to spiritual heights, was Observed by Trumpp to be 'marvellously ignorant of the principles of their own religion.' <sup>78</sup> Narrating his personal experience in later period, Macauliffe admitted with regret "that the practice of the majority of the Sikhs is quite different from

the precepts of their religion. A knowledge of the language in which their sacred books are written is not now possessed by more than perhaps twenty-five men in the world, and perhaps even the number twenty-five is an exaggeration."<sup>79</sup> The custodians of the shrines had become more sanctimonious claiming divine rights to the Sikh shrines which were regarded as their personal fiefdoms and more often abused by ill-spending the public offerings to satiate their licentious desires.<sup>80</sup>

The relationship between the Sikhism and the Sikhs had degraded to that of the cow and the butcher. The Sikhs during post-Ranjit Singh period had by their acts of omission and commission earned such an infamy that the Sikhism shuddered at the sight of the Sikhs similarly as the cow trembles on seeing a butcher.<sup>81</sup> Even the British had inherited a Punjab in which the term 'Sikh' carried no precise or agreed meaning. It covered a varied range of differing indentified, no one of them accepted as standard or orthodox.<sup>82</sup>

"We are told by the writers of 1855 census that the old Sikhs were dying out and newly converted Sikhs were few and that many children of Sikhs were now brought up as Hindus. Now that Sikhism was politically defunct, many Sikhs re-converted to Hinduism in this way the numerical paucity of the Sikhs in 1855 was explained."<sup>83</sup> In a nutshell, "The virtues which the Sikhs link to their heavy catalogue of vices are few in number."<sup>84</sup>

In the prevailing situation it was thought by the intellectuals as an impossible task to introduce any reform or bring the misguided masses to the

right path. "It is impossible in India to make voluntary conversion of any number perceptible in so vast a population without miraculous gifts, rarely claimed by, but always imputed to a new teacher or saint. Devotion and asceticism impress because they are found to connote influence with heaven rather than as ethical examples,"<sup>85</sup>

At such a juncture, a pious soul, in form of Satguru Ram Singh, appeared to rescue the Sikhism. He enjoyed his childhood at Rayan near Bhaini in Ludhiana district of Punjab and passed his adolescence while serving as a soldier in the Naonihal Regiment of the Khalsa army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He had seen for himself as to what a low level the Sikhs, having discarded all the injunctions of the Gurus and the scriptures, had stooped.

Moved by aforesaid appalling situation Satguru Ram Singh threw his Muscat in the waters at Harike- a confluencing point of three rivers-on the eve of the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1845, and returned to his home where he concentrated on the meditations on the holy name of the Almighty for about one year.<sup>86</sup> Then he embarked upon his mission of resuscitating and reforming the Sikh religion through preaching campaigns. He too chose the Baisakhi day in 1914 Bikarmi calendar<sup>87</sup> corresponding to 11<sup>th</sup> April 1857 A.D.<sup>88</sup> for the inaugural function at Bhaini.

"It is curious that the greatest religious reforms have been effected by the laity."<sup>89</sup> Sokrates was a laity. Christ was by trade a carpenter and so was Satguru Ram Singh who also hailed from a similar family and had been a laity as well. He embarked upon the reformation of the Sikh religion.

"The men we admire most, including those we look upon as peculiarly good, are invariably men of notable self-assertion. Thus, Martin Luther was a man of most intense self-feeling, resentful of opposition, dogmatic, with "an absolute confidence in the infallibility, practically speaking, of his own judgement." This is a trait belonging to nearly all great leaders, and a main cause of their success. That which distinguish Luther from the vulgarly ambitious and aggressive people we know, is not the quality of his self-feeling, but the fact that it was identified in his imagination and endeavours with sentiments and purposes that we look upon as noble, progressive, or right. No one could be more ambitious than he was, or more determined to secure the social aggrandizement of his self, but in his case the self for which he was ambitious and resentful consisted largely of certain conviction regarding justification by faith, the sacrilege of the sale of indulgences, and, more generally, of an enfranchising spirit and mode of thought fit to awaken and lead the aspiration of the time."<sup>90</sup>

"...the great men of history were real men, not shams, their characters were genuinely representative of the deeper needs and tendencies of human nature, so that

in following them men were truly expressing to our own tendency expressing themselves.<sup>91</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh wanted to initiate five persons as a token of commencement of the campaigns but from amongst such a degraded society he could not find five Sikhs complete in every respect fully maintaining the code and ethics. They were only two and a half: Lehna Singh Gharjakh and Jamiat Singh Kahna were two complete Sikhs while Jamiat Singh of Gill <sup>92</sup> was a half because he used to charge the interest on the loans advanced to the needy which is a condemned item in Indian religio-social life.<sup>93</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh collected five persons including Kahn Singh Nihang, Labh Singh Ragi, Atma Singh, Naina Singh and Sudh Singh for initiating ceremony.<sup>94</sup> They were asked to take a complete bath with pure water. Then he took the water in an iron pot and started stirring it with double-edged dagger called Khanda <sup>95</sup> concomitantly reading of sacred hymns namely Jap, Jaap, Swayas, Chaupai, and Anand. Satguru Ram Singh was the first to use the weapon Khanda and select the exact five sacred hymns to be read on the occasion now. <sup>96</sup> In this way he prepared the Amrit (Nectar) which was administered to the chosen five Sikhs first.

Thus, the Sikhism was revived by him but the revival was not complete yet. Code of religious conduct which remains to be part and parcel of the religion was yet to be promulgated but sorrowfully it was not fully known in

Punjab<sup>97</sup> though was in vogue at Nanded in Maharashtra where the tenth Guru had temporarily stayed. "As true Govindi Sikhs they (the Dekhani Sikhs-living in Nanded) are careful observers of the five Kakkas and conform strictly to the ordinances of the tenth Guru. (He was) distinguishable from his Punjabi confrere by his dress, which is still much the same as it was in the time of Govind Singh," Bingley had written in 1845.<sup>98</sup>

The next arduous task before Satguru Ram Singh was of deputing someone to Nanded. Absence of transport facilities in those days and abnormal length of the jungle-route consisting of 1400 *Kos* were the main hurdles before an adventurist traveler.<sup>99</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh deputed Bhai Rai Singh- a savant- resident of Mudihar village in Ferozepur district of Punjab, to Nanded with the instructions to bring the code in black and white including the details of the Sikh rites and ceremonies which were still observed there.<sup>100</sup> In the meantime, he himself carried on his preaching tours which attracted innumerable followers around him by the time of return of Bhai Rai Singh , who had left only thirteen Sikhs with the Satguru but found 'an army of Sikhs' on his return.<sup>101</sup> These reformed Sikhs were called the Namdhari*s*-i.e. persons whose lives were based on the holy Name of God .<sup>102</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh, continuing the old practice, whispered a secret word into the ear of the new comer. This manner also was not invented by the Namdhari*s*. A Sikh

scholar has traced the similarity of the mode and meaning etc. of the Name practiced among the Namdharis even to the Old Testament.<sup>103</sup> On hearing the secret word, the neophyte would, like an inebriated person, forget all around him in ecstasy to the extent that he would not even notice his turban falling away .<sup>104</sup> Ecstasy is related to the music or musical singing of the sacred hymns. It is the key to the Holy Name and is produced easily by music, musical singing or poetry.<sup>105</sup>

As a matter of fact, such an ecstasy has wrongly been attributed to the Namdharis as their peculiarity because a careful study of the Holy Granth reveals that such ecstasy had been practiced by the Sikh Gurus themselves too.<sup>106</sup> During such ecstasy, like Mohammeden Sufi mystics, the Namdharis also at certain occasions shrieked loudly, so they are referred to as Kukas (shouters) as well.<sup>107</sup>

The English had assumed 'legal authority' in Punjab in March 1849. The social customs, religious taboos and tenets for them were not only curious but sometimes incomprehensible too. They were infatuated by them, took keen interest in their daily life routine and minutely observed their actions and practices though the knowledge very often was based on the information, right or wrong or biased, provided by their respective informers. Such ignorance is candidly and honestly admitted by Sir Denzil Ibbetson in his preface to the Census Report for the year 1881.<sup>108</sup> At the same time it must be admitted that the records maintained by the British, however, contain very

interesting, informative material and, in certain cases, prove to be the only authentic source of information on the Namdharis.

Satguru Ram Singh issued a circular letter from his headquarters at Bhaini (Sahib), addressed to all the men and women<sup>109</sup> in which he included partly social and partly religious instructions which he desired to be implemented by his followers in letter and spirit. "Rise in the last watch of the night and purify your mouth then bathe, read the scriptures, if they are not known, then acquire them by rote, every one, old women and maiden 'Jap' 'Jap' complete Raihras, Artisohila this much, be particular to learn. All practice virtue and continence. Worship the true God during the whole eight watches. ... Always hide your good deeds. Assemble often. Sing the scripture daily ..." <sup>110</sup> Major Perkins, District Superintendent of Police, added, that 'the converts are ordered to bathe the entire body and wash the hair of their heads every morning at three o'clock. "Pay attention to all, I have taught you, or your faces will be blackened in both worlds. Whoever commits theft, adultery, etc. let him not come to the Darbar, and if he tries to force his way, pray to the Guru to stop him." <sup>111</sup>

Many religions exclude individual person's food habits, dress or language etc out of the purview of the religion, as for instance, the Christianity. "When therefore we say of a religion cast in this type that it is non-missionary, we mean only that it cannot be communicated or entered without changing one's whole manner of life and habitual rules of society. And because we in England

have long ago lost the notion that religion has anything to do with the food we eat, the clothes we wear, or the things we touch, we suppose that a religion thus bound up with a peculiar set of social rules, and resting not upon doctrine, but on custom, birth and status must be incommunicable beyond the society into the web of which it is thus woven.”<sup>112</sup>

“Under religion, in India is comprehended much that in Europe would be reckoned with in the social sphere. In India, all questions of inter-marriage and of eating together, many question regarding occupations and the relations of earning members of a family to idle members are religious not social questions.”<sup>113</sup> Guru Nanak goes to the extent of connecting language with religion and castigates Khatris, his own kinsmen, for having renounced their religion and adopting the language of the Malechhas.<sup>114</sup>

The non-Indians therefore possibly cannot understand the implications regarding the connection between the religion and food habits or early morning bath etc. stressed in Indian religious code. Some religion, for instance, may not have prescribed compulsory bath to its adherents but in eastern life these things mean much more and are indispensible, particularly in Hinduism and Sikh faith. The Sikhs were no longer practicing the injunction regarding the bath in those days or they observed it more in violation than in observation.<sup>115</sup>

The early morning bath has been given much importance terming it as ambrosial bath in Sikh religion and finds mention in the scriptures at many places.<sup>116</sup> In the Indian religious tradition, early morning bath has been equated with the valuable things given in alms perhaps to attract those people who had been habitual to think in the terms of monetary gains. Satguru Ram Singh too adopted the same line. "One who takes complete bath (including the washing of hair too) three hours before the sunrise and reads the hymns coupled with the meditations on the holy Name, is rewarded for having given pearls in alms," he wrote in one of his letters, "then of gold, then of silver, then of copper, then of corn, then of milk, then of water. The bath taken thereafter (after sun-rise) has no other utility than merely washing of one's body. This significance regarding the bath has been uttered by the tenth Guru himself..."<sup>117</sup> complete bath includes the washing of one's entire body including the hair.<sup>118</sup>

The people regarded the efforts made by Satguru Ram Singh as an attempt on introducing his own inventions while the truth lied the other way. It therefore took a considerable time of the diligent and investigative minds to bring forth the reality. As a matter of fact, the revivalism has nothing new. "Dissent ...thus has strong elements of revivalism, in fact, it also can and does become revivalism. But this not may be so if it accepts certain elements of the earlier faith and adds to them certain others which are such reinterpretations of the earlier forms by a logic of the Master that they stand at variance with the cardinal features."<sup>119</sup>

Therefore, there was “nothing new in the Kuka way of life, but intrinsically it is the religion of the Sikhs which has been revived and popularized by them anew,” observed a contemporary Mohammedan historian.<sup>120</sup> “When Sikhism revived, all its divisions resuscitated ... a notable example of this was furnished by the Kukas (shouters) who professed to be ethically strict followers of Gobind Singh...”<sup>121</sup>

“It harked back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual traditions of the community. Its principal concern was to spread the true spirit of Sikhism shorn of a tawdry customs and mannerism which had grown on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy.”<sup>122</sup>

The plausible idea of a statesman very often grows into a movement that usually changes the course of events in the history. “A movement which is spontaneous in the beginning may become organized later on by centring round a leader or leaders. The process of social mobilization includes meeting, campaigns, demonstration, conferences, literature, which are expressive of interest and beliefs.” This author then goes on to discuss the basic elements of a movement too. “Thus, the three basic elements of a movement are collective action, ideology and interests and an orientation towards change.”<sup>123</sup> We shall see that the idea of reforming the Sikh religion soon attained the form of a popular multi-dimensional movement containing all the above mentioned three basic elements. This movement,

however, may neither be called solely the reform nor as the revivalist one but as 'reformists and revivalists at the same time" according to the categorization by Ray.<sup>124</sup>

During the infancy of the reform movement Satguru Ram Singh was looked upon as 'a successor or actual re-embodiment of Guru Nanak,<sup>125</sup> the saint. Soon the people started looking the qualities of Guru Gobind Singh in him because perhaps of his efforts for the revival of the Sikh code introduced originally by the tenth master. In his Justification of the peoples' positive approach, Kapur Singh considers it natural because after Guru Gobind Singh ,there had been no other such reformer with such a bold soul, except Satguru Ram Singh, who might have aimed at such a lofty target of uplifting the society.<sup>126</sup> He "—revived Guru Gobind Singh's ideology and tried to organize the Panth on the lines of Gobindian Republic... organized Sangats in villages and Subas to co-ordinate the activities of the Sangats in a circle or Suba. The Suba was a region consisting of some villages and the leader of the Suba was also known as a Suba. These Subas used to gather at Bhaini Sahib to receive instructions from the Baba which were directed towards purification of the life of the Sikhs and establishment of the Gobindian Republic through Sangats and Subas. The Panch, a fully developed Sikh came to be called a Sant (saint)."<sup>127</sup>

A contemporary historian, who wrote history of the Sikh Gurus in Sanskrit, propitiates Satguru Ram Singh as a Guru in the line of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>128</sup> Evidently, such perception and belief prevailed amongst

the intellectuals of those days till the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>129</sup> Imbued in spiritualism the soul of Prof. Puran Singh too regarded him as such. "The Khalsa chanted the song of the sword composed by Gobind Singh for their daily invigoration. He is said to have composed this song in adoration of some old Hindu goddess; but he merely employed the words used in Sanskrit literature in praise of an old goddess., adapting them to the praise of Steel. In recent history, under the leadership of Bhai Ram Singh, and inspired by the same old life-mantram, "Wahi-Guru", there again rose in the Punjab the semblance of the old Khalsa: The Kukas, whom the last generation saw sitting crosslegged in the posture of Yoga meditation, chanting this Song of the Sword, and springing to and fro-still in their sitting posture, like birds-to the accompaniment of their cry: "Sat Sri Akal. Sat Sri Akal. The original of this at Anandpur may be imagined...."<sup>130</sup> The author of Urdu book *Khurshid-i-Khalsa* goes to the extent of including him in the genealogical tree of the Sikh Gurus.<sup>131</sup>

A well-known Sikh scholar who had not subscribed to the tenets of Satguru Ram Singh, goes still a step farther. He visualizes *deva* in him. During the scholarly discussion on five types of human eyes, he elaborates the *deva chakshu*. "These *devas* or luminous beings, for obvious reasons, are not visible to physical human eyes. Five kinds of eyes, in addition to the human physical eyes, are enumerated in ancient Hindu scriptures." Going into details of the fifth kind of eye, he continues, "Eyes of Light: *Guruchaksu*, such are possessed by the Guru, Budha, capable in like manner, of seeing throughout eternity...

Human beings, in which clairvoyant vision is induced by *nama simran*, or yogic dhyana, or in whom such vision exists from birth by virtue of pre-birth spiritual discipline, are alone capable of seeing *devas* with the physical human eyes. Sometimes *devas* appear unexpectedly to ordinary human beings as well..." Here he cites a rare type of example in form of his personal experience. "The writer of these lines was blessed by such a vision, at about 11 A.M. on a June day in 1947 at Lahore, when Baba Ram Singh Kuka, in *deva* form, appeared to him and conversed with him."<sup>132</sup>

The British officials also opined "that Ram Singh is endeavouring to effect a reform in the Sikh religion and some of his doctrines and precepts are not only harmless but also beneficial." <sup>133</sup> Many native officers "seemed to have a great respect for the tenets of the sect and agree that it is an effort to restore the Sikh religion to its original purity and to do away with the innovations which have crept into it" was observed in another report prepared by the state government.<sup>134</sup>

Every new idea or movement is usually opposed by the vested interests. The reformer therefore has to face abnormal situations. Satguru Ram Singh was no exception. His precepts were opposed mostly by both the Sikh and Hindu clerics whose monetary interests seemed to be adversely affected. The Sikh clergy, who was apathetic towards its prescribed duty, went to the extent of awarding religious punishment to Satguru Ram Singh and his followers.<sup>135</sup>

Calumnious canards were invented to camouflage the truth as well as to tarnish the image of the reformer with a view to dissuade the masses from following him. It was rumoured, for instance, that the watch-word he whispered in the ear of the neophyte was a Mohammedan qualm and that it was secretly whispered to conceal this fact while the truth was that he had adopted this manner of whispering according to the injunctions issued by the Gurus and contained in the Holy Granth.<sup>136</sup> Giani Gian Singh, a contemporary Punjabi historian, who had tested the truth of the matter through personal experience, had stultified the allegation.<sup>137</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh had to cope with calumniators also. He, for instance, had addressed an epistle to the custodians of the Sikh historic shrine at Ananpur during his pilgrimage to that shrine on 20th March 1867 in which he had inter alia said, that they (clerics) act quite contrary to the Grunth" by eating meat, drinking, lying, licentiousness, female infanticide &c. and that therefore, Kookas do not consider them Sikhs."<sup>138</sup> The priests had to eat the humble pie and did not dare to issue any rejoinder.

The Brahmans opposed him rather physically. When Satguru Ram Singh on his return from religious fair at Hardiwar in 1918 Bk., arrived at the village Muthadda Kalan in Phillaur Tehsil of Jullundur district, the local Brahmans conspired to attack the Sikhs with the filthy , obnoxious and prohibited water from the smoking pipes which resulted in some skirmishes leaving the field with the

Namdharis.<sup>139</sup> Surprisingly enough, the Brahmans did figure among his preachers too.<sup>140</sup>

This type of ignoble calumny however did not affect the movement adversely. On the contrary, It rather played its role in popularizing the same. "Towards the close of the last century some of these observances were falling into disuse, but latterly owing to various factors there has been a great revival in Sikhism which has made a very marked advance." <sup>141</sup>

The perversion of the vested interests and the stiff opposition on the part of the clerics notwithstanding, the Kuka preaching gained popularity comparatively in lesser duration of time which was rather a miraculous and astonishing attainment. The villages and towns were impressed and influenced by the preachings of Satguru Ram Singh. Astounded at this, His contemporary historian Ghulam Bheekh recorded in his Urdu manuscript, "When Guru Nanak-the founder of the religion- started the proselytizing, he was not destined to have even one thousand persons among his followers within a period of ten years. His religion had flourished during the times of his successors. This founder (Ram Singh) got lakhs of Kukas during his life time."<sup>142</sup> The British official reports substantiated the aforesaid assertion saying that "tenets of new faith had already gained credence of late in the pergunnahs of Umbala and Ladowa where now might be found some 15 villages composed almost of believers in Ram Singh."<sup>143</sup>

The recruitment of the Namdharis or the Kukas, was reported to be on the increase in 1863,<sup>144</sup> particularly to the south of the Sutlej river.<sup>145</sup> The total Sikh population figuring at 11,41,848 in 1868<sup>146</sup> should not be very perplexing , keeping in view the distribution of 80,000 rosaries by Satguru Ram singh to the neophytes in October 1866 only in Sealkote district as was reported by Captain Thulloch on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1866.<sup>147</sup> This district was regarded as a strong kuka holding and one of the 'chief centres' <sup>148</sup> in nineteenth century. It was compulsory for a newly initiated person to visit the Kuka headquarters at Bhaini<sup>149</sup> and costomary with the Satguru to give one rosary to each newly initiated person which symbolized approval of admission of the individual into the fraternity.

Mohammedans are usually believed not to join a non-Islamic religion but Satguru Ram Singh was reported to have many Mohammedans among his followers. "Ram Singh obtained some converts from among the Mohamadans who are told by Ram Singh and his Soobas that the Mohamdan and Kooka religion are the one. There are some Mohamadans who speak well of the Kooka religion." <sup>150</sup> Major Perkins had reported personal knowledge of two such converts in 1866.<sup>151</sup>

The most surprising and perplexing feature of the Namdhari movement was that its popularity did not remain confined to Punjab only but astonishingly transcended the borders of the country. Abdul Razak- a noble man from Kabul (Afghanistan)- was reported to have

"sent his two sons on a mission to Bhaini, It is supposed, to learn Ram singh's doctrines."<sup>152</sup>

This popularity was ascribed by different people to various factors. The British officials thought it to be the result of the organizational skill of the Kuka leaders.<sup>153</sup> This perhaps was based on the fact that Satguru Ram Singh had divided the land into 22 preaching zones, putting each zone under one representative called Suba (lieutenant) duly authorised to conduct the initiation work as well as attending to the problems faced by the Sikhs. Some reports curiously point to the monetary benefits as the deciding factor. "Kuka converts are put to no expenses whereas to Sikhism are," was disclosed by the Inspector Fazul Hoosain, adding that the Nihungs charged one rupee from each new convert while Kukas baptized the person free of any charge.<sup>154</sup> Bingley discloses another point, that if a (non-Namdhari) Sikh wanted to take the pahul(baptism) for the second time 'he must in addition pay a fine' which could go upto five rupees.<sup>155</sup>

Still another historian puts the magical oration of the Guru as a leading factor responsible for swelling the numbers of Namdharis.<sup>156</sup> The Russian scholars find altogether new reasons which were the religious severity and the democratic system due to which the 'Namdhari movement attracted the large sections of the rural as well as the urban population into it.'<sup>157</sup> An official report alludes to the simplest and the cheapest marriage ceremony incurring 'moderate expenditure', introduced by Satguru

Ram Singh as the reason behind the public attraction towards the Namdharies.<sup>158</sup>

The actual number of the followers of Satguru Ram Singh had become a riddle even for the officials of the state government. "Material is wanting for any accurate measure of the number of Ram Singh's followers ... We possess no accurate census of the population of the Punjab. And the reasons which have hitherto hindered its being taken apply with still greater force to an attempt to obtain an accurate statement of the numbers of a new religious sect,"<sup>159</sup> was confessed by the administration in February 1867. A Delhi newspaper had assessed their strength at 60,000 in 1866.<sup>160</sup> while the Christian missionary, Rev.J.S.Woodside, of the Ludhiana Presbyterian Mission, had put this number at 100,000 in 1867.<sup>161</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh first of all endeavoured to restore some fundamental principles of the Sikh religion previously laid down by Guru Gobind Singh. "But there are other customs which we know are not subject to change because they are more essential or fundamental, such as obedience to parents, and civil authority, telling the truth... and keeping our promises. Morals is a code of right and wrong human actions which each individual establishes for himself by natural inclination, ethics is a scientific discussion of morals."<sup>162</sup>

He therefore stressed the individual morality of the person. He usually would ask the people to forsake all the

vices that had become part and parcel of the Punjabi life. "They (Kukas) inculcate a very strict morality condemning most strongly lying, theft, and adultery and appears anxious merely to revive the Sikh religion to its original state of purity."<sup>163</sup> Major Perkins goes a little deep in details and adds that "All vices are supposed to be foresworn such as lying, stealing, drinking, adultery etc. and are strictly forbidden. Kukas so offending is punished by a Panchayat."<sup>164</sup>

The introduction of punishment for the transgression of the code was perhaps introduced for the first time by Satguru Ram Singh. It 'has three purposes. One looks to the past and two to the future. As looking to the past punishment is called retributive or vindictive. Retributive because it restores the order of justice which has been disturbed by an evil act, vindictive because it upholds the law by putting down the one who has risen up against it by his evil act. As looking towards the future, punishment has two purposes. It is corrective if the purpose is to reform or improve the evil doer, it is deterrent if its purpose is to prevent others from committing the same evil by showing them what happens to such evil doers."<sup>165</sup> This hypothesis reveals the benefits of punishment awarded by Satguru Ram Singh to any transgressor. And this perhaps was why the Namdharies were regarded as the 'punctilious followers of Gobind Singh.'<sup>166</sup>

This characteristic may be substantiated by a few examples from the history which show how much specific and strict these people had been on the question of the

implementation of the injunctions. A thief impressed by the moral preachings desired to embrace this faith. On being told to abjure all vices, he confessed that at that time a stolen mare worth Rupees six hundred was standing at his home. He was directed to return the stolen mare to its original owner before joining the faith and that direction was readily acted upon.<sup>167</sup>

The use of intoxicants was prohibited with equal severity. Baba Darbara Singh, for instance, too was asked about his habits at the time of his initiation. Making startling confession he disclosed that he was a hard drinker, distilling his liquor from 500 male-sparrows, 100 cocks and five male goats in addition to the customary material.

Besides, he was such an addicted opium smoker that he used to stick the drug to the leaves of the trees standing on the village pathways so that it may be readily available if required during the stroll. He as usual was asked by Satguru Ram Singh to get rid of both the intoxicants, which he did at the spot.<sup>168</sup>

"The effect of Guru Ram Singh's teachings on some of his followers was remarkable," observes Narang, "Another of his followers who had committed a murder long before he became his disciple in the District of Gujranwala went to the District Magistrate, after he had joined the sect, and made a confession of such a serious offence, which was punishable with death, after such a long

time. He said it was all due to the grace of Guru Ram Singh.”<sup>169</sup>

The Sikh Gurus had retained the food habits adopted by earlier protagonists of the Bhakti movement who had divided the individual food into three categories of *rajasa*, *tamasa* and *satvika*. The last one is preferred for the religious minded people as it is necessary for survival of a mortal<sup>170</sup> and helps restoring peace of one’s mind which is so necessary for spiritual development and ultimate goal of the seeker-the union with the Supreme.

The Gurus had condemned that kind of food which causes physical illness and growth of vices in mind.<sup>171</sup> “He (Guru Nanak) respected the Hindu veneration of the cow and the Mohammadan abhorrence of the hog, but recommended as a higher rule than either, total abstinence from flesh.”<sup>172</sup> The Sikhs in nineteenth century had changed to the prohibited *tamasa* kind of food consisting of animal flesh and alcoholic drinks etc.

Satguru Ram Singh inculcated the food consciousness among his followers to such an extent that they would, in conformance to the scriptural injunction, refrain from eating from a person condemned for immorality<sup>173</sup> as there had been popular belief in India that such food may not only adversely affect one’s spiritual progress but also can affect the birth of an individual.<sup>174</sup>

The report submitted by Major Perkins that “ A Kuka may not eat food prepared by outsiders and in

support of this assertion it may be added that some Kukas in the Ferozepur lock up declined to receive jail cooked food,”<sup>175</sup> seems to be the result of the aliens’ ignorance of the Indian culture because such food discipline had been the part of the Indian religious life in the past .The Sikhs observed it in letter and spirit.<sup>176</sup>

In Sikhism, “The Hindu usage regarding diet is also held equally sacred, no Sikh, descended from a Hindu family, ever violating it, except upon particular occasion, such as a Gur-matta, when they are obliged by their tenets and institutions to eat promiscuously.”<sup>177</sup> “Strictly speaking, the Sikh father cannot eat with his own son until the latter has taken the Kakke Ka pahul.”<sup>178</sup> Having received the pahul, even the persons from lower castes gave up as much social intercourse with the unconverted members of their tribes as they possibly could.”<sup>179</sup>

The Namdharis had only adopted the centuries old food discipline and preserved it for the posterity. Not to speak of the Sikhs, such distinction existed most surprisingly even among the Indian Christians though shown on some other basis. “Among Indian Christians caste is prevalent. Untouchable Christians are not received in a ‘whole-hearted way. Sometimes Christians of higher caste refuse to eat or smoke with them’”.<sup>180</sup> Bringing out such distinction was perhaps the political compulsion of the foreign rulers consolidating their rule in Punjab.

The people mistook such rigid food disciplinary injunction as the invention of Satguru Ram Singh himself.

This presumption had given birth to a folk song condemning their peculiar nature:

The Kukas are very bad,  
They would lend their pot to none,  
To bathe with.<sup>181</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh himself acted in the same way as he desired his followers to do... He visited the Amritsar district in 1866 where Sardar Shamsher Singh of Rajasansi paid a visit to him. Captain Wall reported in Jan 1867 about the rumour to the effect that this nobleman had embraced the Kukaism.<sup>182</sup> The Sardar requested the Guru to take some food. Satguru Ram Singh asked the former to amend his food habits. The Sardar expressed his inability to abandon the flesh foods. The Guru retorted then: in case you cannot get rid of that habit, then keep your hand away from the bridle of my mare' and left the place.<sup>183</sup>

The Sikhs by the passage of time, had lost all the regards and reverence for their scriptures, particularly the Holy Granth. Satguru Ram Singh during his preaching campaigns would take the sacred volume out of its resting place and would dust it off with his own turban to be followed by the instructions to the masses regarding its respect, reverence and reading etc. With a view to popularize the scriptural reading among the people, he emphasized the learning by heart the book of prayers called Panj Granthi or the compiled five sacred books which contains the selection from the Holy

Granth . With a view to propagate the scriptural reading, he himself ventured to get litho edition of the Holy Granth published from the Aftab-i-Punjab Press owned by Dewan Buta Singh of Lahore.

The Nirmalas are regarded as the pedants among the Sikhs. Satguru Ram Singh openly criticised them for diverting the masses' attention from the Sikh scriptures and directing them towards the Vedas. Such a remark had resulted in the scuffle between both the sects during the religious festival of Ardh kumbh at Haridwar.<sup>184</sup>

Worshipping of tombs, cenotaphs and graves etc. has no place in the Sikh religion and had been condemned by the Gurus<sup>185</sup> but during the period under study, the Sikh visitors to such shrines or places outnumbered the non-Sikhs. Satguru Ram Singh made the people understand the futility of such worship and brought them back to the right path. With a view to practically vindicate the assertion, a large number of his followers attacked and demolished such places at many localities. "It has been mentioned that the conduct of Ram Singh's followers has on the whole been orderly, the only offences which they have as yet been guilty of as a sect have been the destruction of Tombs, idols &c.<sup>186</sup>

During this campaign, in some cases the Kukas were identified as the perpetrators of the 'crime' and were tried while at some others none was identified though in certain cases no evidence was 'obtainable'. This campaign was carried out mostly in Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, Ferozepur,

Gujranawala and Bhatinda districts. During his trial in one of such cases related to Ferozepur, one defendant had stated that "we do not respect shrines or tombs of ordinary men..."<sup>187</sup> In one such case three Kukas were awarded three months' imprisonment and a fine of twenty rupees each.<sup>188</sup>

Dhonkal is a village situated near Wazirabad in Sealkot area where a shrine of Sakhi Sarwar son of Sultan Zain ul Abadin attracted innumerable worshippers in the summer season.<sup>189</sup> The Namdhariis attacked this shrine and the huge bronze bell adorning the shrine brought to their headquarters which was utilized in the common kitchen.<sup>190</sup>

It is commonly believed that the wars fought all over the world in the name of religion outnumber those fought on other questions. The religious intolerance is stated to be the leading factor behind such catastrophes. Satguru Ram Singh loved peace, so he stressed the need of the communal harmony, tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Due to such an approach his assemblies were reported to be attended by all sorts of people including opinionated ones. Even Sodhis of Anandpur, the descendants of Guru Gobind Singh, who were opposed to his preachings in the beginning, were reported to have embraced his faith during his pilgrimage to the shrine in March 1867.<sup>191</sup> He ordained his followers to be tolerant towards even a butcher with blood-soaked dagger in his hand. In case he is not provided with food on his demand, the offender would never be forgiven<sup>192</sup> though, on the other hand, he vehemently preached for the protection of

the cow regarding it a sacred animal as all the Sikh Gurus had done.<sup>193</sup>

The use of blue colour is prohibited among his followers<sup>194</sup> because its preparation compulsorily needs mixture of kine blood into indigo and kine blood can only be obtained by kine- killing which is a heinous crime in Sikh religion.<sup>195</sup> When Satguru Ram Singh visited the Sikh shrine at Mukatsar, the clergy with a view to enrage and to test his amicable nature intentionally presented him a robe of blue cloth which he accepted without any hesitation just as a mark of respect for sake of reconciliation.<sup>196</sup>

"A new faith creates a new world in which old conceptions and institutions may lose their meaning and reason-d' etre. Natural and historical data become abrogated, and a new order of things replaces the old. These changes may be revolutionary much depending upon the extent to which a reinterpretation (consecration) of the traditional element is possible. The preaching of a new faith, even if it should be of a universal character, is addressed primarily to one group of people which may be more or less homogeneous. In culturally higher, differentiated societies the background of the converts is often very heterogeneous."<sup>197</sup> Satguru Ram Singh had to deal with such a population.

As a matter of fact, the Namdhari movement was a kind of religio-social revolution." A revolution is seldom experienced by the dispossessed in whose favour it is supposed to be, for it is often brought about by a small

group of highly dedicated, ideologically ruined men who belong to an unstable transitional class.”<sup>198</sup> Satguru Ram Singh is regarded by some historians as ‘having an revolutionary ideal’<sup>199</sup> His movement was no short of a revolution though it would be more appropriate to call it a puritannical one.<sup>200</sup> A South Indian intellectual sitting in Madras-thousand miles away from Punjab- had invented this term for it while equating the Guru to fifteenth century European reformer Martin Luther. “Ram Singh was essentially a reformer, and like all reformers, a bigot. His object was not to overthrow the Sikh religion but to purify it. He was, or wished to be the Luther of the Punjab, and his followers to be the Protestants or rather Puritans of the Sikh faith, which was to be brought as near to what it was under Guru Nanak Shah as possible.”<sup>201</sup>

Satguru Ram Singh had fully succeeded in his objective of restoring the pristine purity of the religion of the Sikh Gurus. While discussing the success of revivalist movement and its success, very often the example of the strenuous efforts made and the success achieved by this reformer is cited by the sober and serious scholars.

“For specimens of second mode we may take the accounts of the Kookas in the Punjab. ...The Punjab report for that year (1872) which in this part of it reads like the letter of some legate addressed to the emperor from one of the Asiatic provinces of Imperial Rome, sets forth how “Ram Singh, the leader of the sect, a man of considerable ability, was the son of a carpenter, who gradually acquired

a reputation of extreme sanctity, and even for the possession of miraculous powers..."<sup>202</sup>

The people, particularly of Punjab, whom Mohanlal called 'filthy' because, according to his observation, they never bathed or washed their faces,<sup>203</sup> were made to take a complete bath very early in the morning. These Sikhs were strict to wear the immaculate white dress adopted by the founders of the religion along with the woollen rosary and the straight white turban which is described in the official records as insignia of them and which the Europeans including Griffin, partly due perhaps to his ignorance of the earlier tradition and partly to the apathy of the Sikhs towards it, regards as 'peculiar dress'<sup>204</sup> It was called 'Sidha pag' (straight turban) merely because the Sikh Gurus had adopted it. The author of these lines had seen in a museum a picture even of Maharaja Ranjit Singh wearing similar round turban.

The Namdharies practised and maintained such a high morality that there had been never a complaint of any immoral practice or sexual assault against any person despite the fact that the women used to refrain from veil and 'men and women rave together at his (Ram Singh's) meetings, and thousands of women and young girls have joined the sect."<sup>205</sup> An idle man is devil's workshop. Satguru Ram Singh keeping this adage in view did not allow his followers to remain idle because he had made very busy daily schedule for both the family-men and mendicants which prescribed more religious activities for the mendicant in comparison to the family-man.<sup>206</sup> The

high morality of the Namdharies seemed to have led Ghulam Bheekh to believe that one would have seldom seen any wicked person among them.<sup>207</sup>

In his eyewitness - account, Punjabi historian, Giani Gian Singh equates the condition of the Sikhism at that time to that of the wilted vegetation, the resuscitation of which is considered very adventurous. This miraculous task of reviving the same was performed by Satguru Ram Singh in such a way and to such a high level that the wilted vegetation of Sikhism had become incredibly lushgreen.<sup>208</sup>

Another remarkable point of achievements of satguru Ram Singh was that his followers succeeded in maintaining their distinguishing identity while other Sikhs had lost all the features of identifying distinction. "...caste has to some extent been reintroduced and now a days some persons calling themselves "Singhs" may only be distinguished from other Hindus by the fact that they refrain from the use of tobacco or wear the *kes*"<sup>209</sup>

Even the census report for 1901 presented much worse a picture in this respect. Mr. Rose had lamented "It is not easy to say what is the distinctive creed of Sikhism. It is nearly always difficult to state a religious creed, and in the case of Sikhism, there is the great difficulty, that the Gurus from the first to last, like the modern Hindu reformers not to break away from the ancient beliefs but to reconcile them with a pure creed. Unfortunately, this resulted, as probably it always must result, in a medley of beliefs so that within Sikhism we find many religious ideas

at variance with its ideal creed... But this creed is probably accepted and acted up to by a very small number even by those who call themselves true Sikhs.”<sup>210</sup>

“The Kuchh or short drawers the wearing of which was formerly compulsory among Sikhs, are now seldom seen except among Kukas and Akalis and the village grey beards...This is survival of the old Sidha pag or true Sikh turban which consists of twelve yards of cloth, and completely protected the head from sword cuts. It is now only worn by old men and Kukas,” observed Bingley.<sup>211</sup> Similar had been the case of rosary. The Namdharies were the only among the Sikhs to use the traditional woolen rosary as the ordinary Sikhs had started keeping one made of iron.<sup>212</sup>

The sum and substance of the matter is that Satguru Ram Singh had many firsts to his credit. Administration of the baptism to the womenfolk was reserved for him. This ceremony was inaugurated in June 1863 at the village Siarh in Ludhiana district when they were enjoined to wear the short drawer like their male counterparts.<sup>213</sup> This day is still commemorated annually at that village. This step undoubtedly proved to be a milestone in the upliftment of the down trodden women as this brought them equal to the men in religio-social field.

A mystic Mohammedan poet had remarked that ‘had there been no Guru Gobind Singh, all the Indians must have been circumcised<sup>214</sup> implying that they would have been forcibly converted to the Islam. Similarly had there

been no revivalism by Satguru Ram Singh there would have no Sikhs and the following forecast made by some ambitious Christian in some English newspaper would have become a truth: 'Just as we do not see any Budhists in the country except in images, in the same fashion the Sikhs, who are now, here and there, visible in turbans and their other religious forms like wrist bangles and swords, will be seen only in picture in museums. Their sons and grandsons turning Christians and clad in coats and trousers and supporting road stool like caps will go to see them in the museums and say in their pidgin Punjabi: Look, that is the picture of a Sikh-the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time.'<sup>215</sup>

The foregoing is the bird's eye view of the strenuous efforts made by Satguru Ram Singh for the revival of the faith of the Gurus. It can easily be noted by a sober reader as to how hordes of thugs, dacoits, thieves, adulterators, ophiloaters, tomb worshippers, addicts to narcotic drugs, atheists, criminals and such other people were transformed by him. The so-called dregs of the society were deified to the angels. Credit for producing a galaxy of saints and the spiritualists with incredible supernatural powers <sup>216</sup> indubitably goes to him. Such rejuvenation of the Sikh society by Satguru Ram Singh was described by a contemporary historian as the commencement of the Golden Age.<sup>217</sup>

But it is most unfortunate and regrettable that all his sincere and strenuous efforts fell victim to the ignorance of a few, dichotomy of the minority and the bias

of the majority of the historians of the independent India who in their nefarious design to prove more loyal than the king himself have made equally concerted attempts to push such a praiseworthy son of the soil to the oblivion.

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